DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 320 481 HE 023 564

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TITLE Those Who Graduate: A Brief Look at the UNO Graduating Class of 1986.
INSTITUTION Nebraska Univ., Omaha.
PUB DATE Feb 89
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT ESS Reports; v2 n1 Feb 1989

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Persistence; *College Graduates; College Transfer Students; Data Collection; Ethnicity; *Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; Minority Groups; School Demography; School Entrance Age; Time Factors (Learning)
IDENTIFIERS *University of Nebraska Omaha

ABSTRACT

The University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) conducted a study of 1,358 bachelor's degree graduates of the class of 1986 to examine two factors: (1) age at entrance and graduation, and (2) length of time required for graduation from several specified beginning points. The study required four sets of data: demographic, age related data, time-frame related data, and ethnicity related data. Survey findings included: (1) There were 51% male versus 49% female graduates; (2) half of the graduates had moved directly from high school to college, one-fourth had transferred to UNO, and one-fourth had delayed entrance into UNO after high school graduation; (3) The average age at entrance was 18.5 years and over 96% were under 20 years; (4) over 64% of UNO graduates took less than 6 years to graduate; and (5) There was a clear disparity between male and female graduates who were identified as minority group individuals (60%-40%). Recommendations included repeating the study every 5 to 7 years; examining differences between minority group students who graduate and those who do not; and, due to the large numbers of transfer students, reviewing policies dealing with transfer credits. Contains eight references. (GLR)

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ESS REPORTS

Volume II. No. 1. February, 1989

THOSE WHO GRADUATE: A BRIEF LOOK AT THE UNO GRADUATING CLASS OF 1986

by A. E. Crawford

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THOSE WHO GRADUATE: A BRIEF LOOK AT THE UNO GRADUATING CLASS OF 1986

by A. E. Crawford

Introduction

Colleges and universities have been concerned with the retention and attrition of their students for numerous years (Astin, 1975; Cross, 1974; Chickering, 1974). The literature of the 1970s and 1980s is replete with examples of research related to the marketing of institutions to attract students, as well as of efforts to retain them following matriculation (Beal & Noel, 1980; Kemerer, Baldridge & Green, 1982).

In 1986, as a part of efforts to enhance enrollment management, the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) engaged in a detailed assessment of present practices. In the project consultants' report it was stated that:

> At present, campus officials know comparatively little about student attrition. Current data is limited to cohort survival studies (degree completion rates) for selected classes by enrollment status. UNO lacks information about retention issues in the context of other student characteristics... it is a critical first step in campus efforts to understand and then attack campus attrition problems (Kemerer & Green, 1986, p. 33).

Questions Asked. — This study was designed to examine two factors related to students who graduated from UNO during the 1986 year. The factors were: (1) Age at entrance and graduation, and (2) Length of time required for graduation from several specified beginning points. The time frame included the two semesters and the summer terms of the 1986 calendar year. The study required four sets of data from each graduate. The specific data were:

1. Demographic: Sex of graduate; birthdate/age of graduate; college of entry at initial enrollment to UNO; college in which enrolled at graduation from UNO; and ethnic status.
2. Age related data: Age of graduate at graduation from high school or receipt of GED; age of graduate at entrance to their initial college or university (UNO or otherwise); age of graduate at their initial enrollment to UNO; and age of graduate at their graduation from UNO.
3. Time-Frame related data: Length of time from high school graduation to graduation from UNO; length of time from college entry (anywhere) to graduation from UNO length of time from entry to UNO to graduation from UNO.
4. Ethnicity related data: Ethnic distribution of graduates by college of graduation; ethnic distribution of graduates by term of graduation.

Data Collection Procedures. — Graduates included in this study were those persons named on official University of Nebraska at Omaha graduation lists as approved by the University of Nebraska Board of Regents. The three lists contained the names of 1,358 persons who were graduated with the bachelor's degree in 1986. Characteristics entered for each of the graduates included full name, student number, date of birth, sex, ethnic status, date of high school graduation or GED, date of initial enrollment to a college or university, date of initial UNO enrollment, college/unit at entry to UNO, college and academic major field of study at graduation from UNO. Information to complete each data element was gathered from the Student Information System (SIS), hard copy records from the Registrar's office, and data provided by the Office of Institutional Research. The data were entered into a micro-computer and grouped according to the questions asked by the study.

Limitations of the Study — Any study must, of necessity, be influenced by factors that can limit the application or scope of the data under consideration. This study was no exception, and is limited by the following:

1. There are no indications that the results yielded by this 1986 class are descriptive for any other year. Thus, until replication is accomplished or other confirmation provided, caution must be exercised in suggesting these data represent a pattern for UNO graduates.
2. The original study plan envisioned the use of ethnic status within several of the questions under study. The low numbers of minority graduates rendered this plan impracticable. Thus, no suggestion can be made that this study provides for the definitive description of minority graduates.

Results

Demographic. — This study was based on data developed from the records of 1,358 bachelor's degree graduates of the University of Nebraska at Omaha dur-

ing the 1986 calendar year. There were 633 baccalaureate graduates from the Spring 1986 Semester (86-1), 239 baccalaureate graduates from the Summer Term, 1986 (86-2), and 486 baccalaureate graduates from the Fall 1986 Semester (86-3). Of the graduates, 691 (51%) were men and 667 (49%) were women. Over 91% of the graduates described themselves as Caucasian, 4.4% as Black, 1.8% as Asian-Pacific Islander, 0.8% as Hispanic, and 0.2% as American Indian-Alaskan. Only 13 persons (1%) of the graduates failed to provide ethnic data (see Table 1) Men comprised 60% of the minority graduates (N=59) while women comprised only 40% of that group (N=39). The College of Arts and Sciences graduated 29% of the minority students, followed closely by the College of Continuing Studies with 27%. The College of Public Affairs and Community Service graduated 14% of the minority graduates. Those three colleges graduated minority students in percentages greater than their contribution to overall graduation rate. The other colleges graduated a smaller percentage of minority students than they contributed to the overall graduation rate.

TABLE 1

ETHNIC STATUS OF GRADUATES AND AVERAGE ENROLLMENT

Ethnic Status	1986-1 N	1986-1 %	1986-2 N	1986-2 %	1986-3 N	1986-3 %	1986 Total N	1986 Total %	3-year avg. UNO Enrollmt. * N	3-year avg. UNO Enrollmt. * %
1. White	590	93.2	206	86.2	451	92.8	1247	91.8	12,835	91.9
2. Black	20	3.2	22	9.2	17	3.5	59	4.4	621	4.4
3. Hispanic	4	0.6	2	0.9	5	1.0	11	0.8	186	1.3
4. Asian	10	1.6	8	3.3	7	1.5	25	1.8	108	0.8
5. Indian/Alaskan	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.6	3	0.2	32	0.2
6. No Response	9	1.4	1	0.4	3	0.6	13	1.0		
Non-Resident Alien**									559	1.3
Total	633	100.0	239	100.0	486	100.0	1358	100.0	13,968	100.0

*These data are from the UNO HEGIS and IPEDS reports for 1985-87
**This category is not a UNO SIS data base listing but is from HEGIS/IPEDS

The College of Business Administration (BA) provided the largest number of graduates (N=363; 26.7%), followed by the Colleges of Arts and Sciences (AS) (N=288; 21.2%); Continuing Studies (CS) (N=200; 14.7%); and Education (ED) (N=194; 14.3%). The Colleges of Public Affairs and Community Service (CA), Engineering and Technology (ET), Home Economics (HE) and Fine Arts (FA) provided the remaining 23.1% of the graduates. Data presented at Table 2 show the colleges of enrollment at initial entry to UNO and at graduation for persons included in this study. By definition, Non-Degree and University Division do not grant degrees. They were, thus, losers of 100% of those who initially entered their units and who graduated. The Colleges of Public Affairs and Community Service and Continuing Studies were the large gainers in the changes of college from entrance to graduation (+6.4% and +4.2%, respectively). The College of Arts and Sciences was the big loser of numbers among the degree granting colleges (-4.9%).

TABLE 2

COLLEGE OF ENROLLMENT/GRADUATION

College	UNO College at Entry N	UNO College at Entry %	UNO College at Graduation N	UNO College at Graduation %	Difference N	Difference %
Arts & Sciences	355	26.1	288	21.2	(67)	(4.9)
Business Administration	343	25.3	363	26.7	20	1.4
Public Affairs	54	4.0	141	10.4	87	6.4
Continuing Studies	142	10.5	200	14.7	58	4.2
Education	163	12	194	14.3	31	2.3
Engineering & Technology	127	9.4	117	8.6	(10)	(.8)
Fine Arts	34	2.5	27	2.0	(7)	(.5)
Home Economics	24	1.7	28	2.1	4	.4
Non-Degree	24	1.7	0	0	(24)	(1.7)
University Division	92	6.8	0	0	(92)	(6.8)
Total	1358	100	1358	100	[200]	[14.7]

The data developed by this study also indicate that, while there was a relatively even representation of men and women in the graduating class, the picture was different when considering individual colleges. There was a broad difference within colleges concerning the sexual representation of graduates (51% men, 49 women). While the College of Arts and Sciences provided graduates in proportion to the percentage of the total graduating class, 93% of the graduates of the College of Engineering and Technology were men whereas only 4% of those receiving degrees from Home Economics were men. In comparing the percentages of male/female graduates to the average male/female enrollments of the degree-

granting colleges over the past 10 years, one finds that the graduation percentages were relatively close to the average enrollment percentages. For example, 50.3% of Arts and Sciences students were men while 51% of the Arts and Sciences graduates were men; 57.6% of the College of Business Administration students were men while 58% of the CBA graduates were men. These comparisons are highlighted in Table 3.

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF AVERAGE ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGES WITH ACTUAL GRADUATION BY COLLEGE OF GRADUATION

College	Avg. Enrollment Pct. 1978-87		Percentage of Graduates by Sex	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Arts & Sciences	50.3	49.7	51.0	49.0
Business Administration	57.6	42.4	57.9	42.1
Public Affairs	48.5	51.5	39.7	60.3
Continuing Studies	53.0	47.0	58.0	42.0
Education	24.1	75.9	21.7	78.3
Engineering & Technology	92.2	7.8	93.2	6.8
Fine Arts	45.2	54.8	37.0	63.0
Home Economics	7.6	92.4	3.6	96.4
Total	52.8	47.2	50.9	49.1

Age Related Results — The average age of the 1986 UNO graduates at the time they graduated from high school or received a General Educational Development (GED) equivalency was 18.5 years. Over 96% of the group were under the age of 20 at the time they graduated from high school. While the average age of these graduates at the time they initially entered a college or university was 19.5 years, 81% were under the age of 20 at that time. The median age of these graduates at the time of their high school graduation and of initial entry to a college or university was 18.2 and 18.4 years, respectively — for all practical purposes the same. Data presented at Table 4 clearly indicate that a difference existed between the average age of these graduates at their entry to UNO and their high school graduation and initial college enrollment. The average age at their initial UNO enrollment was 22.2 years (19.8 median). Only 47.6% of these graduates were under the age of 20 when they initially enrolled for courses at UNO.

TABLE 4

AGE OF UNO GRADUATES AT SEVERAL STAGES OF THE PROCESS

Age	Age at High School Graduation		Age at Initial Entry to College		Age at Entry to UNO		Age at Graduation from UNO	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
16 & under	4	0.3	6	0.4	5	0.4	0	0
17	43	3.2	29	2.1	8	0.6	0	0
18	939	69.1	731	53.8	388	28.6	0	0
19	326	24.0	335	24.7	245	18.0	0	0
20	18	1.3	71	5.3	122	9	1	0.1
21-25	16	1.2	119	8.8	358	26.4	710	52.2
26-30	5	0.4	29	2.1	116	8.5	331	24.3
31-35	0	0	16	1.2	46	3.4	151	11.1
36-40	2	0.1	13	1.0	39	2.9	85	6.3
41-45	1	0.1	2	0.1	18	1.3	36	2.7
46-50	4	0.3	6	0.4	6	0.4	27	2.0
51 plus	0	0	1	0.1	7	0.5	17	1.3
Total	1358	100	1358	100	1358	100	1358	100
Low	16		15*		17		20	
High	49		53		62		66	
Mean	18.5		19.5		22.2		27.8	
Median	18.2		18.4		19.8		25.2	
Mode	18		18		18		23	

*"Early Entry" enrollment

Some explanation for this difference can be found when the age of these graduates at their initial UNO enrollment is examined by the college or unit of their initial enrollment. In all cases, the average age by college was over 20 years. However, students from three units, the College of Continuing Studies (mean age, 25.3 years); Non-Degree (mean age, 23.4 years); and the College of Education (mean age, 23.4 years) were clearly older than the other graduates at the time they initially entered UNO. When these three units, which comprised 24.2% of the graduates, were removed from consideration, the average age for the remaining graduates dropped by seven-tenths of a year. Further, when these three units were discounted, the percent-

age of students under the age of 20 at their initial entry to UNO rose from 47.6% to 51.2%. This is not a startling change, but a clear directional trend.

The ages of the graduates at the time of their graduation from UNO reflected the urban, commuter nature of the university. The average age of this group at their graduation was 27.8 years (median 25.2 years). While over 50% of the graduates were in the 21-25 year age range at graduation, almost one-eighth of the graduates were over 35 years old at the time they graduated, and over 23% were older than 30 (see Table 4).

Data broken out by college suggest that there was a clear subgroup impact upon those age statistics. Students graduating from the Colleges of Continuing Studies and Education comprised 29% of the study group. Their combined average age at graduation was 31 years. When they were removed from the age-at-graduation statistics, the mean age at graduation for the remaining colleges droppeJ by 1.4 years, from 27.6 years to 26.2 years. Further, when these two colleges were eliminated from the distribution, the percentage of students in the 21-25 age range changed from 52% to 61%, and the percentage of students graduating prior to age 31 changed from 76% to 85%.

An examination of data related to age differences of graduates by college of entry based upon the sex of the graduates provided some interesting statistics. Men who initially enrolled at UNO in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Public Affairs and Community Service, Engineering and Technology, and Fine Arts were clearly older than their female counterparts (.7 years to 2.0 years difference). The reverse was true for graduates who initially enrolled at UNO in the College of Education (1.5 years difference) and as Non-Degree students (1.9 years difference). However, by the time of graduation, differences in ages between men and women had shrunk and in some instances reversed. For example, the few women who were graduates from the College of Engineering and Technology averaged 1.2 years older than their male counterparts (a 2.6 year reversal) and women graduates from the College of Arts and Sciences averaged .5 of a year older than male graduates of that college (a .8 of a year reversal). Women graduates from the College of Education continued to be older than male graduates from that college. However, the difference shrank from 1.5 years to .8 of a year. Men who graduated from the College of Business Administration averaged .8 of a year older than their female counterparts, versus .1 of a year difference at their initial UNO enrollment. Finally, male graduates of the College of Fine Arts were only .6 of a year older than Fine Arts women graduates at graduation, as opposed to the 2.0 year differential at their initial UNO enrollment.

Results Related to Years to Graduation. — For this group, the mean length of time from high school graduation to graduation from UNO was 9.3 years and the median length of time was 6.7 years. The average number of years from the initial enrollment at any college or university and ultimate graduation from UNO was 8.3 years (6.2 years median).The disparity between the mean and median lengths of time between high school graduation/initial college of enrollment and graduation from UNO was clearly related to the large numbers of graduates, primarily from the Colleges of Continuing Studies and Education, who took extensive periods of time to graduate. Over 31% of all graduates spent between 10 and 43 years from their high school graduation to graduation from UNO. Over one-fourth of the graduates spent from 10 to 39 years between their initial college or university enrollment and their UNO graduation (see Table 5). Over 64% of the 1986 UNO graduates took less than 6 years to graduate from the time they entered UNO, while only 12% of the graduates spent 10 or more years from UNO entry to graduation. This would appear to be indicative of either a heavy class load while enrolled or the transfer of large numbers of credit hours from other institutions. General enrollment credit hour statistics for UNO tend to support the latter reason.

TABLE 5

NUMBER OF YEARS TO GRADUATION

Number of Years	HS Graduation to UNO Graduation N	%	College Entry to UNO Graduation N	%	UNO Entry to UNO Graduation N	%
1	0	0.0	0	0.0	72	5.3
2	0	0.0	0	0.0	131	9.6
3	7	0.5	19	1.4	150	11.0
4	204	15.0	230	16.9	267	19.7
5	296	21.8	315	23.2	261	19.2
6	148	10.9	177	13.0	142	10.5
7	108	8.0	112	8.3	82	6.0
8	87	6.4	83	6.1	51	3.8
9	78	5.7	78	5.7	41	3.0
10-14	200	14.7	183	13.5	102	7.5
15-19	111	8.2	87	6.4	36	2.7
20-24	62	4.6	45	3.3	18	1.3
25-29	26	1.9	16	1.2	4	0.3
30-plus	31	2.3	13	1.0	1	0.1
Total	1358	100.0	1358	100.0	1358	100.0
Low	3		3		1	
High	43		39		32	
Mean	9.3		8.3		5.7	
Median	6.7		6.2		4.7	
Mode	5		5		4	

The examination of the number of years taken to graduation by college and by sex of the graduates revealed results that differed little from those found for the age characteristics of these graduates. The impact of graduates from the Colleges of Continuing Studies and Education on the data is strong enough so that, when they are removed, the average number of years from high school graduation to UNO graduation became 7.9 — a reduction of 1.4 years. At the same time the mean number of years required by graduates from their initial college entry to their UNO graduation changed from 8.3 for all graduates to 7.1 after the elimination of Continuing Studies and Education graduates. Thus, those 394 individuals, representing 29% of the study group, had a strong impact on raising the average number of years taken to graduate from UNO.

In contrast to the data reported above, the graduates from a single (or a combination of) collegial units did not have a strong impact upon the time required to graduate by these students from their UNO entry to their UNO graduation. With Continuing Studies students included this average was 5.7 years. With Continuing Studies graduates removed the average only dropped to 5.3 years. The median for this category did change from 5.7 to 4.7 years with Continuing Studies graduates not considered. That would reflect the impact of long-time Continuing Studies students.

The differing amounts of time required by men and women to graduate remained a factor when examining the length of time taken from initial college entry to UNO graduation. There was basically no difference for all men and all women in this regard. However, on the average, men graduating from the College of Business Administration took a year longer to graduate than did women graduating from that college. Further, women graduating from the College of Education, Fine Arts, and Public Affairs and Community Service took almost one year longer from their entry to a college or university to graduation from UNO than did their male counterparts. Median data for these groups remained consistently lower than the arithmetic average. Clearly the mean data were influenced by the several individuals who took many years from college entry to UNO graduation.

Conclusions

General.

1. Those who graduated in 1986 generally appeared to be more like traditional college students than did the general UNO population. The differences implied by this suggest that a degree may not be a goal for large numbers of non-traditional UNO undergraduates.
2. While a relatively even distribution existed between men and women within the entire graduating class, clear differences existed among colleges with respect to the proportion of male and female graduates.
3. For every college, the sexual group that predominated in general enrollment also predominated in percentage at graduation and did so to a greater degree.
4. A person's initial enrollment in University Division would appear to have a positive impact upon graduation. While the average University Division percentage of UNO enrollment has been about 5%, 6.8% of the graduates began their UNO enrollments as University Division students.
5. The Non-Degree status category has been a legitimate beginning for small numbers of graduates. On the average, 4% of UNO's enrollment has been listed as Non-Degree — not seeking a university degree. At the same time, 1.7% of the 1986 graduating class began their UNO enrollment as Non-Degree students.
6. Other than the non-degree granting units of University Division and Non-Degree, which have not been designed to graduate students, the College of Arts and Sciences was the big loser in numbers of students from UNO entry to graduation.
7. Data developed by the study with respect to the ages of these graduates when they graduated from high school and entered college, and the lengths of time required to complete their baccalaureate degree, indicated that:
   a. about one-half of the students who graduated from UNO in 1986 could be considered as traditional high school graduates who moved directly from high school to UNO enrollment and graduation from UNO.
   b. about one-fourth of the 1986 graduates moved directly from high school graduation to a college or university other than UNO, but later transferred to UNO and graduated from UNO.
   c. the last one-fourth of the 1986 graduates delayed their initial college entry or took extended periods of time away from college between enrollments. They were clearly older at the initial entry to college and at graduation and took longer to complete their degrees than would be considered traditional.

Related to Age at Enrollment/Graduation.

8. The 1986 UNO graduating class was very close to traditional in nature at high school graduation. The average age was 18.5 years and over 96% were under 20 years of age.
9. The traditional student pattern had somewhat disappeared for the 1986 graduating class by the time they initially enrolled at UNO and graduated from UNO. The average UNO entry age of 22.2 years was 3.7 years older than the high school graduation average age, and the average graduation age of 27.6 years was 3 to 4 years above that which could be generally expected of traditional college students.
10. Larger numbers of older students in the Colleges of Continuing Studies and Education clearly influenced the average age figures for students initially enrolling at UNO and graduating from UNO.

Related to Time of Graduation.

11. The overall average amount of time required by members of the 1986 UNO graduating class from high school graduation and initial entry to college to UNO graduation was almost double the time span considered traditional.
    a. Graduates from the College of Continuing Studies strongly influenced this time factor. Their average length of time from high school graduation to degree completion was over 15

years and their time from initial college entry to UNO graduation was over 13 years.

b. College of Education graduates influenced time-to-degree completion patterns in a manner similar to that for Continuing Studies graduates.

12. Time differentials ceased to exist as factors for the entry to UNO-graduation from UNO category. For all students, the average time was under 6 years; Education graduates averaged less than the all-student average, and even Continuing Studies graduates averaged under 8 years from their entry to UNO graduation from UNO.
13. There was little difference between the average times required by men and women to graduate. However, differences were found when sexual groupings were examined by college of graduation. In the three colleges in which they were the predominant sex, women took almost one year longer than men in which to graduate from the time they initially entered college.
14. There was a large difference (over 1 year) between men and women from the College of Fine Arts with respect to the amount of time required from their entry to UNO and their graduation from UNO. This pattern was not reflected in the other colleges.

Related to Ethnic Status.

15. The fact that ethnic minorities, as a group, graduated at least in proportion to their percentage of the general student population is encouraging. The average minority enrollment over the period 1985-87 was 6.7% of the student body and was exceeded by the 7.3% of the graduates identifying themselves as members of a minority.
16. Three colleges clearly graduated minority students in percentages greater than the overall percentage of minority graduates: Continuing Studies (13.0%); Public Affairs and Community Service (9.9%); and Arts and Sciences (9.7%). The other colleges, percentages were all below the minority average.
17. While there was a rough balance between all male and all female graduates (51%-49%), there was a clear disparity between male and female graduates who were identified as minority group individuals (60%-40%). Further, in all instances, except for the College of Engineering and Technology, the sex which predominated in percentage also exhibited a like minority percentage which was greater than for the general graduating student group.

Recommendations

General.

1. Replication of this study should take place, for the of purpose of verification and information, every 5 to 7 years (next in 1991 or 1992).
2. There should be an examination of **satisfaction** with respect to their degree and employment for all students, but especially those who began their collegiate career in one college and later changed to and graduated from a different college.
3. Degree aspirations of UNO students require examination; especially those of the non-traditional student.
4. Attempts should be made to survey like institutions for information comparable to that produced by this study, in an attempt to generate knowledge as well as common working data base.

Age Related.

5. UNO officials should become aware of the large numbers of transfer students, work to identify primary source institutions, and develop clear institutional policies with respect to those individuals that impact upon the acceptance of general education courses and other transfer credits.
6. The phenemonen of the older student and the colleges of Continuing Studies and Education could be examined in greater detail. Aspects of present and projected employment and degree utilization would be of special interest.

Time Related.

7. As the average time required to graduate from initial UNO enrollment was less than 6 years, there could be an examination of the number of credit hours produced at UNO by graduates from various colleges and programs.

Ethnicity Related.

8. The differences between minority group students who graduate and those who do not should be examined.
9. Since belonging to the predominant sex or ethnic group in a collegial unit appears to tend toward supporting graduation, relevant data should be examined to determine if the reverse of such factors impedes graduation.

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